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English teachers must teach the reading skills which high school students need to handle informational reading matter and the more thoughtful magazines on the market, as well as the materials every adult encounters on the job or in pursuing a hobby. They must concern themselves with teaching students to read nonfiction prose for the following reasons (1) Students with high I.Q.'s and reading scores may still be reading below their capabilities. (2) The materials that students must read in school become increasingly complex in syntax and over-all organization. (3) The concepts that students must master become more abstract and complex. (4) Reading skills must be taught because students will not acquire them automatically. (5) Much prose nonfiction is not well-written and, thus, students need adequate reading skills to get through it. (6) Teachers of other subject matter are not teaching these reading skills. Several excellent books are available for the teacher or administrator interested in improving reading instruction. (LH)

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Reading Development in the High School English Class: A Rationale and Some New Sources

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There is much that we English teachers can do—much that we have to do, I will argue—to help high school students read non-fiction prose with greater efficiency and power. I am excluding from consideration here what is certainly our most important reading development task, helping students read prose fiction and poetry with greater understanding and deeper response. Our first concern always should be in sharing with our students the delight and wisdom of those plays and stories, poems and novels to which they can respond. However, I think we must find time to teach the necessary reading skills for non-fiction as well.

A DEFINITION

Quite different demands are made on the student by a Faulkner short story and a chapter in a social studies textbook, a Cummings poem and a report of a road test of the new Honda 350 Scrambler, or a novel like *A Separate Peace* and an essay in *Harper's* analyzing the extent to which school districts in the South are complying with the Supreme Court integration decision in 1954 and subsequent court decisions relating to that issue. An efficient reading—one at the "right" speed and one permitting recall of the main ideas—of the chapter and the report and the essay calls for a special set of skills. Most basic will be word recognition. The student will certainly encounter some new words which he could deal with in a variety of ways: pronouncing aloud, analyzing into parts, guessing from context, or finding in the dictionary. He will also need some previewing and skimming skills. He will need to know the importance of adjusting his reading rate to the difficulty of the material. He will need to be able to distinguish between the main ideas and supporting details in the paragraphs or sub-divisions of the selection. He

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must know the main idea of the whole selection. He should be able to interpret what the writer is saying. He may need to know where to inquire about references or allusions. Finally, he may need some outlining and summarizing skills. This set of skills, then, defines the developmental reading task that we should be concerned about.

Obviously, the student I have in mind is already an able reader, at least sentence by sentence. He has mastered all of the skills of beginning reading instruction. He has "learned to read." He is not a candidate for corrective or remedial reading instruction.

Why Teach Developmental Reading Skills?

There are at least six reasons why the high school English teacher must concern himself with developing reading skills for prose non-fiction.

1. *Students with high I.Q. and reading scores on standardized tests may read inefficiently.* A student's score on the paragraph comprehension section of a standardized reading test would be no adequate measure of his ability to identify and understand all the main ideas (or the main idea) in a *Harper's* essay on school integration. Certainly it does not indicate what strategies he has for analyzing the interrelationships among related ideas, for isolating those which may have special emphasis, for working out the implications of the ideas. There is a very good chance, despite his being in the fast track on the basis of high I.Q. and reading achievement scores, that he is deficient in these skills.

2. *During the high school years the materials the student must read become increasingly demanding and complex in syntax and over-all structure and organization.* To say it another way, he must learn to deal with an increasingly sophisticated written-language rhetoric. During the elementary grades he is asked to read non-fiction selections which are controlled for both vocabulary and syntax; invariably, these selections are brief. Suddenly, in the seventh grade, and increasingly so from that point on, these controls are lifted: sentences are longer and more complex in structure; selections are longer and organized in new ways. It seems apparent that he has not learned all he needs to know about reading when he has completed the sixth grade. Reading is truly a developmental process, and that development continues for all of one's life.

3. *During the high school years the concepts the student must learn become increasingly numerous and more complex and abstract.* Many of these he is expected to acquire through independent reading and study: furthermore, he will be expected to talk about them and write about them. A corollary to this increase is the heavier vocabulary "load"

in his reading material. For example, many of the materials in the new social science curricula are primary source materials of a wide variety—from yellow journalism editorials to official government documents, some from earlier centuries—and they are very demanding reading in terms of concepts and vocabulary, as well as syntax and organization. In English we occasionally ask the student to read literary history, biography, and literary criticism written in a mature and demanding style.

4. *Reading skills should be taught.* Only very rarely will a high school student acquire them "organically," from wide reading. Some adults have not acquired them on their own even after years of college reading and independent reading. We need to show students how to use these skills self-consiciously and consistently whenever they read for information.

5. *Much prose non-fiction the student is asked to read is not well-written or well-organized, and he needs adequate reading skills to get him through it quickly and painlessly.* Some textbooks are deadly dull. Consider the prose in the California Vehicle Code, which the student must read and comprehend in order to pass the test for his driver's license. All of us would like to forget at least one set of instructions for a few essay questions which our students found nearly impossible to read.

6. *Other subject-matter teachers are not teaching reading.* They should be, but they are not. At least as far back as 1925 most discussions of secondary reading development have insisted that every subject-matter teacher must accept the responsibility for teaching his students how to read his materials, but this insistence has had almost no effect on the schools. Ideally, every teacher should teach the writing and reading skills necessary in his subject. But since we have not reached that ideal—not because teachers are stubborn, necessarily, but probably because they are untrained and feel inadequate in dealing with reading or writing skills—most teachers and administrators will expect the English teacher to take this responsibility. Certainly we know what the parents expect. After a year in college many students feel strongly that some teacher should have helped them develop better reading skills. In sum, somebody at the high school should be doing this job, and the English teacher is very likely the only one trained for it and the English department chairman the best choice to provide the leadership and organizational talent required to make it possible for high school students to acquire these important skills.

Some New Sources

For the teacher or administrator interested in this problem there are

several excellent new sources. The best textbook available in secondary reading is Robert Karlin's *Teaching Reading in High School* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1964). This book explores theoretical concepts in learning and reading and then translates them into specific teaching procedures. Perhaps the best set of readings on this subject can be found in *Improving Reading in Secondary Schools: Selected Readings,* edited by Lawrence Hafner (Macmillan, 1967, in paper). The selections include research reports and articles on specific reading skills. There are fifteen articles on teaching reading skills in subjects other than English. This might be the one to order for the principal or the curriculum director.

A book that has created widespread interest recently among English teachers is Daniel Fader's *Hooked on Books: Program and Proof* (Berkeley Medallion Books, 1967, in paper). While it is not concerned only with developmental reading, but rather with a total English program, it is a very effective argument for a school-wide approach to reading and writing.

Another stimulating source is Maurice Eash's *Reading and Thinking* (Doubleday, 1967, in paper), a book which explores the interrelatedness of written language and thought, the relation of language to concept development. Four essays, by other authors, discuss the use of reading materials in social studies, language arts, mathematics and science. A final essay by Eash presents an excellent defense of the use of written materials in the classroom, a defense which is welcome at a time when we may be feeling oppressed by Marshall McLuhan and all the glowing reports of the future of computer assisted instruction.

Conclusion

I want to be perfectly clear that I am not suggesting a new emphasis for the high school English curriculum. The trinity—literature, language, and composition, as delineated by the National Council of Teachers of English and the California *English Language Framework*—remains our central concern. However, we must admit that our students are required to read a great deal of prose non-fiction. On their own, some of them read *only* prose non-fiction. Those going on to college will have the most strenuous demands made upon their reading abilities. We must be willing to teach the reading skills needed to handle the informational reading matter and the more thoughtful magazines on the market, as well as the materials every adult encounters on the job or in pursuing a hobby. Right now English teachers appear to be the only ones able to do this job.